OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

MODULE: COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Learning Units: 1-6

1 INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

Communication in remote teams is a make or break factor, so choosing the right ways to do this with a remote team is key.

Looking at the Remote – How 2020 survey results, you can see that a large majority of managers are evenly using synchronous and asynchronous methods. For the 12% that are mainly using synchronous communication, their teams are communicating in real-time mainly through meetings. With communication being so key for remote workers, thought needs to be taken about the methods and ways remote teams communicate. Without being in the same office or sometimes even the same time zone, organic ways of communicating become much more difficult. Certain instantaneous methods of communication, known as synchronous communication, can help replicate this to some extent. Examples of synchronous communication include phone calls, video chats, online meetings, and chat messaging services.

Using a video call to communicate with your team members can be good for getting the message across quickly, but it's not always a possible option to take.

Differences in time zones and working hours are a good example of where synchronous communication isn't the best idea. Situations like task setting in a remote team also provide a good example of when we should use asynchronous communication.

It can be likely in remote teams that not everyone is available at the same time due to flexibility in working hours and being based around the globe. Using an instant messaging service in this scenario isn't the best idea. Examples of asynchronous communication include: email, comment functions in collaborative software, and work message boards. Asynchronous communication allows for a remote team member to deal with messages in a time and manner that suits them, and reduces the amount of interruptions they have in their working day.

How do you understand communication? Is it just speaking, listening and writing? What is important in communication in remote work?

In fact, everything we do or don't do communicates something. What we say and how we say it, how we act or don't act, what we wear or what car we are driving. Everything sends a message.

You need to understand this, to make sure that what you are communicating is what you really intend to communicate.

2 LECTURE NOTES

2.1 REMOTE COMMUNICATION - INTRODUCTION

Remote communication has not and will not automatically take over the standards of face to face communication. Shifting away from office space and, even more, from shared workspace and daily interpersonal contact can challenge even the most experienced managers. If we want this contactless communication to be effective and we want to maintain good relations, it requires some effort and mastering the tricks to this new game.

What does this new communication model involve? What are we deprived of and what have we gained?

Let's take written communication channels - we are talking email, chats, online communicators, phone text messaging and such, where messages travel in an instant, which is a virtue and a vice at the same time. While "sent", the message in most cases cannot be "unsent", so haste and sloppiness are not recommended when writing online messages. It is impossible to react quickly to the astonished facial expression of an employee who has just received a message meant for the boss's husband. Written messages demand precision and empathy. When composing them, one needs to think not only if but also how the message will be understood by the recipient and make sure the intended message gets through. Why is it so important? First of all there is no access to the immediate reaction of the other person to what we are saying – be it verbal, body language or facial (even" rolling the eyes" would be welcome nowadays). So immediately the word "precision" comes to mind: make sure what you want to say.

Written instantaneous communication also has its bright side – it is fast, it can be immediate, there is always a trace of the conversation left, it demands no involvement in the recipient's mood changes nor losing time chit chatting.

Written communication has always been with us, so only to refine our habits, in one of the units below you can read what is the guarantee of its effectiveness.

Partly due to the COVID 19 pandemics, the majority of us have been forced to transfer to working remotely and communicating remotely, hence the abundance of new remote communication models, tools and misconceptions.

Luckily, before this has affected all of us, some companies have already mastered this way of working and are willing to share their best practises. They provide examples we can look into for guidance on how to adapt to the dynamics of remote communication and even how to manage remote working teams. A Great Place to Work-Certified™ company Peerfit points out a set of crucial factors that will make remote work easier.

1. Remember the learning curve – not everyone in your organisation is a tech wizard and will master the new tool in an instant; in fact some will have recurring problems with it over and over again and here some empathy may help more than mere contact with the technical support.

2. The lack of human interaction is stressful and you can help your employees feel more connected to each other while they're physically apart by maintaining the habits they/you had in the office. So remember to say "good morning" personally, to everyone present, as if you would do when meeting people in the office. *What other habits came to your mind to help all of you feel the connection?*

3. Make sure you convert to video meetings when having one-to-one conversations. Whenever you can, abort phone calls and go for video – one look at the facial expression of your employee will save you hours of explaining and will help maintain good relations

4. Set up a special channel for informal chatting – conversations that would normally take place in the kitchen or by the coffee machine. You may want to set aside a virtual wall for posting holiday pictures or pet pictures.

5. Encourage more and more communication - consider investing in an internal messaging system – it will give employees a way to communicate quickly and efficiently while not putting additional strain on their email boxes.

2.2 ASKING QUESTIONS AND LISTENING SKILLS IN THE REMOTE AND DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Asking the right questions: a communication strategy for all times

Although managing people remotely requires similar skills to face to face management, there are several twists especially to asking questions.

Asking questions seems to be an obvious skill that everyone has mastered. Yet there is some substantial knowledge that can help us make the most of this skill while we are working in a remote environment.

Asking questions and what is more, the right questions at the right time, is at the heart of effective communication in remote work. By using the right questions in a particular situation, you can gather better quality information and learn more, build stronger relationships, manage people more effectively, increase their self esteem or even help them learn. Questions can be asked to solve problems, to exchange ideas, to empower people and encourage teamwork.

Asking questions improves remote communication at work. Asking the right questions at the workplace, both to employees and to managers, is a strategy to create good relations and to achieve goals. It is a crucial point in any conversation, which has to be well managed in order to avoid misunderstanding among people but overall to reach the objective.

Questioning skills in remote work will help any manager to focus on issues that are often unspoken, allowing managers to create a better employee experience.

And how do you use questions to manage the work, improve communication and reach the goals when working remotely? While most of us went into remote work straight on, without any preparation, there are in fact some good questions to ask that, when you listen to answers, will substantially increase the comfort of all working remotely.

Examples include:

- What experience do you have working remotely?

- What are the biggest challenges or surprising conveniences you face working remotely?

- How do you manage time? How, when, and where do you feel most productive?

Questions that are always handy can be grouped according to the purpose they serve.

Most often managers use questions for:

1. Individual and team communication and collaboration purposes:

   a. How would you rate the way we communicate in our virtual team?
   b. What could be improved in our virtual communication?
   c. What else could be done to make us work better together in the future?

2. Employee well-being and adapting to remote work:

   d. How do you feel working remotely?
   e. What do you like and don't like about working remotely?
   f. What challenges would you suggest to make remote working more enjoyable?

3. Employee engagement and growth

   g. Do you feel included in your team's decision process?
   h. How do you like your current set of tasks?
   i. Are there any other projects or tasks that you would be interested in but haven't gotten the opportunity to work on yet?
   j. What are your long and short-term professional goals?
   k. What else would you like to learn or do?

4. Goals, progress tracking and feedback

   l. What are your targets/goals for the next 3 months? Will you be able to achieve these goals/ meet targets on time?
   m. What do you think of your current work performance?
   n. Are there any tools, processes, or tasks that would improve your work performance?
   o. If you could do one thing differently, what would it be?"
   p. Is there anything I can do better to support you and your work?"

Preparation of an appropriate set of questions to ask in a remote conversation is one of the most important parts of managing a remote team. Asking the right questions at the beginning of any remote conversation is a good start to productive dialogue as it also requires the manager's active involvement in listening with empathy and following up with exploring questions. When asking questions through the meeting,

managers can better understand teams' work activities, collaboration patterns, observe productivity signals, and burnout signals to lead productive and empathetic conversations.

- ○ **How to use listening skills for the benefit of your organisation?**

Verbal communication involves both speaking and listening. In any organisation, listening is key to effective work relationships among employees and between management and staff. Effective listening is an active process that involves focusing on what is said without allowing one's thoughts to interfere with the process.

If you are not convinced that you can gain more through listening than mere talking look at the potential benefits:

You can gain information

Listening enables you to acquire facts so that you can make decisions that benefit your business. By listening to a job applicant in an interview, for example, you might discover his attitudes toward the profession, performance in previous jobs and information not detailed in his resume. This additional insight can help you decide whether the applicant is a good fit for your company. A supervisor who listens to an employee's complaint about a health risk on the job, might reduce injuries and enhance job performance.

You will develop trust

Listening is essential to building trust. If one member of a team doesn't listen to instructions, an entire project might fail. To develop trust, pay attention to verbal instructions and deadlines. Listen for statements a coworker might make regarding his own strengths and weaknesses as related to a project, so that you can collaborate in a way that maximises each other's strengths.

You will maintain your reputation

The reputation of a business may also depend upon listening skills. If you fail to listen to a customer, for example, the customer might not receive the service or product she expected. When this occurs repeatedly, it can tarnish the company's reputation. A company develops relationships with other businesses through verbal communication, too. Talking on the phone and working on a task at the same time can result in misunderstandings.

You will reduce and manage conflict

Listening can reduce conflict, especially the one arising when an individual is feeling misunderstood or mistreated. If, for example, you talk to an employee about his performance, stop talking, concentrate on listening and looking for nonverbal clues as well, then you can follow up with questions and… keep listening. If an individual's facial expressions, gestures or behaviour contradict her words, ask questions to find out what she really means.

Motivate Employees

A manager can improve morale and productivity by understanding what motivates each employee. Listen to employees to discover what aspects of the job they find most rewarding and challenging. Don't expect to understand an employee's needs from a single conversation. Continue to be an attentive listener so that the employee knows you are sincerely interested in what he/he has to say.

Listening is a hard job. Luckily it is also a skill that can be mastered. And it is even more worth attention when working in a virtual environment, where quite often you cannot see each other properly, where you tend to concentrate on the message and not on the way it is delivered. If you want to work on your listening skills, give the other person your full attention, ask for the camera ON and maintain eye contact. To restrain your mind from going astray, when the other one is done speaking, make notes to rephrase her remarks and check your understanding. Continue to ask questions to gain a better understanding of her statements. Check out any discrepancies you notice between the message and the body language – this way you will show your empathy and improve the effectiveness of communication.

2.3   EXERCISING INFLUENCE REMOTELY

What is pre-suasion?

Robert Cialdini (2016) defines pre-suasion as "the process of arranging for recipients to be receptive to a message before they encounter it. (…) what we present first, changes the way people experience what we present to them next." In other words, this is a way of exercising influence (persuasion) that takes place before ("pre-) a specific stimulus.

Cialdini claims in his book that our choices are in most cases determined not by the factors that offer the most accurate or useful counsel but by the ones that we find most engaging.

The mechanism of pre-suasion is effective because humans have the tendency to overrate the importance of a person/thing/phenomenon as soon as it attracts their attention and to perceive causality – we usually pay special attention to the causes of what is going around us, and when we pay special attention to something we perceive it as a cause.

The stimuli that make us strongly receptive can be divided into two groups – attractors and magnetizers. The first ones simply attract attention and the second ones keep it on the stimuli, which is also beneficial for the influence.

<u>The Attractors</u>

The Sexual

Sexual stimuli are a strong attractor but the reaction to them is conditional. They work only if there is a strong association in the recipient's mind between sexuality and the stimulus to which we want to attract his attention. That is why sex sells cosmetics and form-fitting clothes and not electronics for example.

The Threatening

Our attention alerts us to threats, that is why presenting threats to our personal safety or the safety of those we care about is useful in attracting our attention. That is why an efficient way to exercise influence and to change sb's behaviour is to present threats to them and then reduce their fear by informing them how to eliminate those threats (do what we want them to do).

The Different

Our attention reacts easily to changes in the environment and often concentrates on sth that stands out from the crowd. So one way to use this feature for exercising influence is to give somebody more than two alternatives, just making sure that the one you want to promote, stands out. Then he or she is more likely to choose that alternative than in a situation when she has only this alternative and a second one.

The Magnetizers

The Self-Relevant

Our attention is drawn to information pertaining to us or relevant to us. Just by using the word *you* we can capture the attention of our interlocutor. If you can, by all means, ask the questions that will encourage the other party to talk about himself or herself.

The Unfinished

This is known in psychology as the Zeigarnik effect. Bluma Zeigarnik discovered that we tend to remember better tasks that are interrupted or uncompleted. If we concentrate on an activity and it is interrupted, it still occupies our mind and we feel the need to complete it as soon as possible.

The Mysterious

This technique is used widely by writers and teachers. To effectively use mystery as a magnetizer one needs to:

1. expose the subject as a mystery

2. deepen the mystery with surprising observation

3. discount plausible but incorrect explanations

4. provide a clue to the real explanation

5. solve the mystery

Bibliography

Cialdini, R. (2016). Pre-Suasion: A Revolutionary Way to Influence and Persuade. New York: Simon and Schuster

2.4 COMMUNICATION DURING MEETINGS

These are the results of the study that focuses on the good, the bad and the ugly of using videoconferencing for work-related meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting stay-at-home orders have led to significant changes in the way people work. One of these changes involves increased use of video conferencing as a means of communicating or holding work meetings. Zoom, for instance, had 10 million daily meeting participants in December 2019, but by April 2020, that number had risen to over 300 million (Evans, 2020).

Yet, for many, the increased use of videoconferencing has been challenging. By now we know that many users complain of Zoom fatigue or feeling mentally and physically exhausted by video conferencing (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020; Strassman, 2020). The culprits here are:

- prolonged direct eye gaze
- the factor of the images of others on screen that can appear too big and too close, triggering increased brain activity, biochemical changes, and physiological states that are associated with high alert and fight-or-flight,
- information overload as they attempt to focus on multiple faces at the same time,
- people or things visible in others' backgrounds that draw attention ,
- the chat function can also add to participants' information processing load, especially if the content detracts from the meeting,
- seeing one's own self-image can make users hyper-aware of themselves and their appearance, leading to the feeling of self-consciousness and always being *on*.

Because videoconferencing is likely to become the preferred mode for business meetings and working from home may become permanent for many, a greater understanding of the potential challenges caused by video conferencing is needed.

Meeting Science

When constructed well, meetings (video meetings included) can provide a forum for creative thinking, discussion, debate, information sharing, problem solving and decision making. They can also help organisations meet important employee socio-emotional needs such as empowerment, engagement, affiliation, and perceptions of supervisor support.

When poorly structured and managed, meetings can result in negative employee dispositions that lower employee perceptions of their work and well-being, as well as negatively impacting an organisation's bottom line.

There are practises described in an effort to address problems which frustrate meeting participants and to improve meeting effectiveness, which appear to be the same for virtual meetings:

- calling a meeting only when necessary,
- including only those people whose expertise and knowledge is required,
- preparing and following an agenda,
- starting the meeting on time, avoiding distractions and multitasking, and
- actively encouraging everyone to participate.

Additional practises that were defined as adding value to <u>virtual meetings</u> include:

- selecting a meeting facilitator,
- choosing the appropriate mode of communication (e.g., phone, email, videoconference),
- setting meeting norms,
- establishing team roles,
- recognizing time zone and cultural differences, and
- following up with action items after the meeting.

Use of Videoconferencing for Workplace Meetings

This paragraph will focus specifically on the use of videoconferencing for business meetings (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, GoToMeeting, Skype for Business). To date, research has examined the capabilities supported by videoconferencing and other meeting modes (e.g., face to face, audio conferencing), as well as the effectiveness of various meeting modes in achieving certain meeting objectives.

For example, in comparison to face-to-face meetings, <u>videoconferencing does not allow for:</u>

- life-size presence in a shared space,
- the transmission of haptic (touch) or olfactory (scent) cues,
- the ability to observe what attendees are looking at,
- to see attendees' body language and gestures,
- to have side conversations with one or more attendees, or to examine and/or manipulate specific physical objects (e.g., prototypes or samples),
- understanding the social dynamics of the group (i.e., who is important) and view communicative signalling, such as who was looking at whom.

Research has also examined <u>participant engagement and multitasking behaviour during video conference meetings</u>.

- Participants reported feeling lower motivation to engage both behaviorally and cognitively when participating in a meeting remotely versus face to face.

- They also noted that turning one's video on or off was a crucial signal of engagement, with camera *on* signalling high engagement and camera off indicating low engagement.

- Multitasking is a common behaviour in videoconference meetings, with about 30% of meetings involving email multitasking (especially when the video camera and microphone were turned off).

- Multi-tasking is more likely to occur during meetings that are large, long in duration, scheduled during the morning, regularly recurring, and perceived as less relevant.

The positive and negative effects of technology on team collaboration

The research suggests that videoconferencing provides the opportunity to communicate with others and share ideas. However, while virtual meetings were generally welcomed by individuals living alone who craved social contact, working parents complained more of Zoom fatigue and having too many meetings or perceiving meetings as intrusive, with some noting increased role conflict due to the blurring of work-life boundaries.

The affordance theory perspective allowed to analyse the use of videoconferencing systems (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom) during COVID-19 resulting in defining 5 major affordances and 5 constraints.

+ The use of videoconferencing allowed users the opportunity to communicate with social groups, engage in shared social activities with family and friends, attend events, pursue hobbies, and consume non-recreational services (e.g., webinars).

- The constraints included problems with the technology or incompetence in setting up the videoconferencing system, fear of being on camera, Zoom fatigue (being always *on)*, exposing one's private living space, and lacking security (e.g., Zoom bombing).

Meeting Management Issues

Issues pertaining to online meeting management that demand tending to:

- managing latecomers,
- lack of an agenda,
- too long meetings,
- too many meetings,
- back-to-back meetings (jumping from meeting to meeting without a break)
- participants who multi-task.

To make the most out of Zoom (or any other) meetings.

(1) Always set an agenda and goals for the meeting.

(2) Set the time and manage the time well. Zoom fatigue sets in if meetings go beyond 1.5 hours and one has to be in those meetings four times a day.

(3) Consider the number of attendees. Just because a Zoom premium account allows 200 participants in a meeting room, it doesn't mean you maximise the room space. Of course webinars are a different matter.

(4) Online meetings are still a part of work, they require professionalism. Being on time and coming to meetings prepared are still required.

(5) Use chat function and polling to enhance participant involvement and engagement in the meeting.

Practical Implications – general overview

With the initial onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees had to learn almost overnight how to use video conferencing, and our findings suggest many appear to have merely "muddled through." Given research evidence showing that employee satisfaction with meetings is a distinct component of their overall satisfaction and a significant source of job-related stress and well-being (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2018; Rogelberg et al., 2006), it is important for organisations to take the time to properly train their employees on how to use videoconferencing, including the standard protocols about the use of the microphone (e.g., mic off when not speaking) and proper camera/screen positioning. Such training should not only include the key features of the platforms used for virtual meetings (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet), such as screen sharing and break out rooms) but new features of videoconferencing platforms or apps that enhance meeting effectiveness. For example, Krisp is a third-party app that cancels out background noise, and Muzzle silences pop-up notifications during screen sharing (Kelly, 2020).

Many employees are unaware of social norms or meeting etiquette, thus organisations should provide expectations about how employees should present and/or conduct themselves in virtual work meetings. In addition, employees should be provided with training on ways to improve meeting structure by utilising an agenda and establishing ground rules on meeting facilitation (e.g., use of the chat feature, raising one's hand to speak). Managers and senior organisational leaders play a key role in reinforcing the importance of this training, as well as modelling appropriate meeting structure and behaviours. Because some of the comments in this study cited problems with Zoom fatigue and back-to-back meetings, organisations should carefully consider whether videoconferencing is being overused. In some instances, an email, phone call, or use of a messaging system (e.g., Slack) may be more effective.

Bibliography

Karl, K.A. , Peluchette, J.V., Aghakhani, N. (2021). Virtual Work Meetings During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Good, Bad, and Ugly. *Small Group Research.* Retrieved from: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10464964211015286

2.5   GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK REMOTELY

- o   **Definition**

Feedback is about information we receive from others defining their perception of our behaviour, actions and performance, the way we respond to it and how we interact with it.

The role of feedback within any organisation cannot be overemphasised. In fact, employees typically rely on this mechanism to know if their performance aligns with the organisation's vision and if they're meeting expectations. Without feedback, employees may feel lost or unmotivated.

But there is also another tool - a concept developed by business educator and coach, Marshall Goldsmith, that is now an increasingly popular practice in today's workplaces, it is called FEEDFORWARD. When practised daily, it can provide leaders with useful insight and help create a more positive work environment for the future while assisting employees in moving past barriers slowing down and negatively impacting their productivity and performance.

What is the difference between feedforward and feedback and how to use both tools for both employers and employees alike?

Feedback vs feedforward

When an employee receives feedback, they get information about how they're presently performing.

Feedforward is the reverse exercise of feedback. It does not concentrate on the analysis of the problems that happened but on the ways and ideas that can **prevent problems** from happening. That is why almost always it is so well received by employees, as opposed to feedback that is almost always associated with negative emotions and looking for excuses. It helps to move the focus from the past to the future. As M. Goldsmith says, it is always better to show to people how they can improve something than to prove to them that they are wrong.

Feedforward

So before we talk about feedback, you may want to try **FEEDFORWARD** sessions with your employees (online will work just fine) following the procedure below. First you will need time to run it one-to-one with each employee, nex, when they are proficient, you can organise them in pairs and they will continue working.

1. Ask the employee to DESCRIBE his/her GOAL in simple and clear terms. The goal might be, "I want to complete more tasks every week." And to ask for suggestions.

2. The partner (you or other employee) will give useful suggestions on how to achieve this goal. There should be zero references to the past; the focus is on making the future better.

3. The problem "owner" is to LISTEN CAREFULLY. Without combating the message. He/she is to write down suggestions and only give positive statements, like "That is an impressive notion."

4. Then the "owner" says THANK YOU (this is not a time for debate) and reflects on the suggestions provided.

5. When you get to the stage when the employees do that activity in pairs, at this step they SWAP ROLES; repeat the steps with their partner describing their goal and then providing feedback.

- **Feedback**

- **A difficult skill of receiving feedback**

No matter how skilled the feedback giver is, the role and skills of the receiver are equally important during the process and significantly affect its effectiveness.

When receiving feedback we need to demonstrate adequate listening skills and become a careful listener. It is easy to be distracted; we just listen to our thoughts; the minute we hear potential "accusations" we try to generate reasons for our actions, to provide excuses for our behaviour and actions or we are thinking about our response (Poertner, Miller 1997). More efficient way is to try and clear our minds, listen carefully, concentrating on the person giving the feedback, and consider what the person is trying to say.

The same is valid when receiving positive feedback; we need to carefully consider it, instead of just being enthusiastic about it. Does it match other evidence of our effectiveness or is there specific information on which the feedback is based?

It is important to keep all feedback in perspective -even if presented poorly- and to try to learn from it – as there is always room for improvement. If one person is not providing enough or adequate information, it is important to try to learn as much as you could and ask questions to clarify your understanding, so as to maximise your benefit from the process. Same is valid when someone is not giving useful feedback; you can ask for more details to define what you can do better.

Even though it is not necessary to accept feedback in all cases, it is helpful to keep an open mind and concentrate on how feedback will enable you to perform better, instead of just being defensive. It is also important to try to manage and control your emotions, when the feedback causes an emotional response that is intense.

Handling criticism and challenging inappropriate feedback

Even in cases involving criticism and inappropriate feedback, there is no value in becoming angry or defensive. If you are feeling upset about being criticised, always give yourself time to calm down before responding or taking action.

In any case, it is suggested to try to separate out what is being said from how it is being said and to understand the intention and purpose of feedback, even though it is not adequately expressed. You might consider whether the same or similar issue has risen before or whether you actually know about the problem but were just hoping no one would notice. In this case, the ideal response should always be to think about what you can do and how you can behave to improve the situation.

3 CASE STUDIES

3.1 Solving remote communication problems

Presentation of the environment

CompuServe is a small IT service company. They provide all range of computer services including: computer hardware upgrading, computer repair and selling new and off-leased refurbished laptops, PC computers and networking equipment. CompuServe employs 12 IT service technicians and 4 salespeople. Most of the work is done online or at the client's premises. Thanks to the way the work is organised, the company does not need to rent a large office. An additional benefit is the time saved on commuting to the office.

The whole organisation is managed by the owner. Most of the time he communicates with the employees remotely and once every fortnight they have a face to face meeting. During those meetings he defines the job to be done and distributes responsibilities; there is always time for questions but employees seem to understand everything and meetings finish quickly. As it often happens, there are misunderstandings. While on the shop floor, problems arise since employees do not fully understand instructions but are afraid to mention this to the boss since they would have to contact him directly on the phone or online. They think that if they do, the boss will consider them incompetent.

Problem

Several problematic situations have occurred in the company recently. This resulted in poorly executed service repairs for a key customer. After having checked with the service technicians for possible reasons, the boss got the impression that they did not fully understand what he had had in mind when explaining his expectations. The owner decided he would like to organise a meeting to discuss what can be done to avoid such problems in the future and to improve internal communication.

Task 1

Imagine that you are the owner of that company. In preparation for the meeting with the employees answer the following questions:
- What could be the causes of these problems?
- If the problem is caused by faults in communication (which you suspect) what would you do to avoid such problems in the future?
- How would you implement those procedures?

Write your findings in the comments area below.

Task 2

Prepare the meeting structure:
- What information would you want to get from them?
- What questions would you ask to get information? Prepare some examples
- How would you make sure that they understand your intentions? Prepare some examples

Write your findings and examples in the comments area below.

3.2   Designing virtual meetings and delivering presentations

Presentation of the environment

P&V Inc. is a medium sized company employing 95 people. At the moment they have 9 regional offices located in the main cities of your country. You are the regional manager of one of the regional offices. Before pandemics, every month you meet with other regional managers and Country Sales Managers in P&V headquarters to discuss sales results, problems and plans in each region. The meeting was usually organised in a hotel in one region and lasted 6-8 hours, mostly spent on listening to presentations. The real value was the evenings that you used to meet informally to exchange experiences and ideas, discuss problems and benefit from solutions suggested by other colleagues.

During the pandemic times you had to change your habits. Face-to-face meetings were replaced by virtual ones. From your perspective those virtual meetings were less time consuming than in-person ones. You didn't have to travel, you just opened the Zoom app on your computer and that's it. After the first two virtual meetings you found out that you had to be active only during your presentation and participate in general discussion at the end of the meeting. During other managers' presentations you could switch off your video camera and do something else. Anyway, all other presentations had the same structure and only numbers were different.

Problem

After 6 months, the Country Sales Manager decided to change something. He still wanted to keep the virtual formula for monthly meetings but would like to discuss with all regional managers what could be improved. He found out that the impact from virtual meetings was not the same as face-to-face ones. Something was missing. Interaction between participating managers was very low. He suspected that they were doing other things during each others' presentations. Sometimes he had a feeling that it was useless to waste time for idle discussions.

Task 1

As the regional sales manager analyse the questions prepare for the discussion:

- In your opinion why those virtual meetings became less effective than in-person?
- Did the managers lose anything when in-person meetings were replaced with virtual ones?
- Why are most managers passive during presentations?

Write your findings in the comments area below.

Task 2

- What changes would you do in the virtual meeting structure to make it more productive?
- What would you change in the meeting agenda to make all participating managers more active?
- What would you change in your presentation to increase audience engagement?

Write your findings in the comments area below.

4   PRACTICAL EXERCISES

4.1   Communications skills during meeting

Learning unit:

- Communication Skills.

Topic:

- Communication during meetings

Goal:

- Knows how to prepare for remote meeting

Competences:

- Set clear meeting goals for virtual meeting
- Using questioning and influencing skills in virtual meetings

Instructions:

- Individual practice with feedback from the manager/trainer.

Duration:

- Getting ready for the meeting – 1 week
- Meeting with employees – 30 min.
- Evaluating the job done and discussion with the manager /trainer - 45 minutes.

Performance criteria:

- Goals and objectives set in writing according to SMART setting rules
- Influencing sentences and questions designed to achieve the objectives
- Meeting reviewed with the supervisor and "better" version designed if needed

Recommended literature:

- PP presentation: Exercising Influence
- Online resources

Presentation of the environment/ instructions

Most often when managers/leaders think about future meetings with employees they try to prepare what to say during conversation. Most professionals believe that they should prepare for such meeting by asking themselves 4 questions:

1st: Why are we meeting?

2nd: What actions do I expect from employees during and after the meeting?

3rd: What should I do, say or ask to make them do these tasks with commitment?

4th: What will be the agenda/structure of the meeting

These 3 issues are extremely important when the meeting will take place in a virtual environment, when managers cant see all reactions of the audience (employees).

Your task is to:

- Prepare for a virtual meeting with your employees
- Conduct the meeting
- Reviewed the meeting with the supervisor and prepare "better" version designed if needed

Before the meeting:

Write down:

- your goals and objectives for the meeting (should comply with the SMART principles)
- actions expected from employees during and after the meeting
- sentences and questions you may use during the meeting
- the agenda/structure of the meeting.

The knowledge that you may want to review includes:

- Lecture notes: Structuring online meetings
- Presentation: Exercising influence
- Lecture notes: asking questions and listening skills
- Online resource – SMART goals setting

During the meeting:

Be flexible. Use only those sentences and questions that fit the conversation and meet your goals.

4.2   Giving constructive feedback where expectations differ

Learning unit:

- Communication skills.

Topic:

- Feedback

Goal:

- Knows the characteristics of clear/meaningful and effective feedback
- Understands the role of giving and accepting feedback

Competences:

- Set clear expectations
- Recognise clear and effective feedback
- Implement the effective feedback principles in practice

Instructions:

- Individual practice with feedback from the manager.

Duration:

- Getting ready for 2 feedback conversations – 1 week
- Feedback conversations – 2x ca15 minutes.
- Evaluating the job done and discussion with the manager /trainer - 45 minutes.

Performance criteria:

- Expectations set in writing according to the model
- Feedback given following the criteria
- Feedback reviewed with the supervisor and "better" version designed if needed

Recommended literature:

- PP presentation:
- Online resources

Presentation of the environment/ instructions

Each of us likes when clear expectations are set. We know what we are supposed to do and we know when we are doing it the expected way (most of the time). Yet from time to time we are faced with the situation that employees do not work to the expected standard. In such a case the review of expectations and feedback are the immediate tools a manager can use.

Your task is to:

- Choose two of your employees who are performing below the standard and prepare yourself to conduct a feedback conversation with them (one by one, of course); next, conduct feedback conversations.

Before the conversation:

While getting ready for the feedback conversations, make sure you review the goals and objectives set for/with these particular employees and define in precise terms (with facts where possible) why you are unhappy with their performance.

The knowledge that you may want to review includes the rules of giving constructive feedback, listening at all levels to make sure you understand what is being said (topic: listening) and using questions to move the conversation forward and gather the interlocutor's perspective (topic: asking questions).

During the conversation:

Follow the tips (below) on giving constructive feedback and make sure you finish the conversation agreeing on the next steps and setting expected outcomes clearly.

Knowledge tips:

Well formed outcome is:

- Positive, tangible, specific, written
- Initiated and amended by you
- Richly describes (see, hear, feel,etc) outcome
- Mutually beneficial
- Flexible
- Next step clear
- Increases future choices

7 golden rules of feedback

- Timely – do it quickly, face to face and in private
- Specific and owned – agree the facts
- Ask and listen
- Criticise action/behaviour not individual
- Why it is important
- Agree on an alternative approach
- Value the individual

5 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Content: Learning Unit 2 - Asking questions and listening skills in the remote and digital environment

Question: Why, as a manager, should you pay special attention to developing your listening skills?

Answer: Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is key to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood. As a result, communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated.

Content: Learning Unit 2 - Asking questions and listening skills in the remote and digital environment

Question: Are listening and hearing the same?

Answer: Hearing refers to the sounds that enter your ears. It is a physical process that, provided you do not have any hearing problems, happens automatically. Listening means paying attention not only to the story, but to the way it is told, to the use of language and voice, and to the way the other person uses his or her body.

Content: Learning Unit 6 - Formal remote communication

Question: What are 5 top activities listeners do while watching someone present remotely?

Answer:

- 42% read emails or text messages
- 28% complete work not related to the presentation
- 28% scroll through memes on social media
- 27% use the bathroom
- 26% listen to music or prepare meals

Content: Learning Unit 6 - Formal remote communication

Question: Why are most work presentations boring?

Answer: Canva's survey found three reasons your colleagues' minds start to wander during presentations:

- 60% say they're too long
- 54% say they're too data heavy
- 52% say they have dull or uninspiring visuals.

Content: Learning Unit 6 - Formal remote communication

Question: How to engage your audience during presentations and meetings?

Answer: By asking questions, showing gratitude, incorporating humour, or including entertaining or relatable photos and videos, we can make audiences more engaged in our presentations, and leave them less tempted by distraction

6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

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Q1: *HR Director to his subordinate: "You will go to that meeting next Thursday with this training company we have chosen to do training for us."*

Sub: "Why?"

HR: "Because I am your boss and I'm telling you to do it."

This is an example of:

A1: Communication

A2: Power

A3: Manipulation

A4: Influence

Q2: *HR Director to his subordinate: "We have a meeting next Thursday with this training company we have chosen to do training for us."* This is an example of:

A1: Communication

A2: Power

A3: Manipulation

A4: Influence

Q3: *A shopper in a supermarket is approached by a hostess saying that she has a gift for him. She says that he will receive a bottle of expensive perfumes completely for free. Then she takes a bag into which she packs the gift bottle together with another one and hands it over to the man saying that the 1st bottle is free if he buys two bottles.This is an example of:*

A1: Communication

A2: Power

A3: Manipulation

A4: Influence

Q4: *HR Director to his subordinate: "We have a meeting next Thursday with this training company we have chosen to do training for us. If you go to that meeting you can leave early on Friday."* This is an example of:

A1: Communication

A2: Power
A3: Manipulation
A4: Influence
Q5: Receiving a mint from a waiter increased the tip by 3%. The tip increased by 14% when people received two minutes and when a single mint was given but after giving the mint the waiter left and then turned back and gave the second mint saying that it is "especially for nice people" – tips increased by 23%. This is an example of:
A1: Reciprocity
A2: Authority
A3: Liking
A4: Scarcity
Q6: *In a study conducted in a real estate office, people calling with a request for being connected to an agent were informed by the receptionist about years of experience that the agent had (15 or 20). Due to this introduction the number of appointments increased by 20% and the number of signed contracts – by 20%. This is an example of:*
A1: Reciprocity
A2: Authority
A3: Consistency and commitment
A4: Scarcity
Q7: *To avoid difficult questions during a presentation the presenter says: "It is an honour to speak in front of such an audience. I really appreciate that you have come here despite the early hour and ugly weather." This is an example of:*
A1: Reciprocity
A2: Social proof
A3: Consistency and commitment
A4: Liking
Q8: *To increase the number of people who have joined, signed up, and donated, websites publish names of the people who have already done it. This is an example of:*
A1: Reciprocity

A2: Consistency and commitment
A3: Social proof
A4: Authority
Q9: *Asking the patients to write down appointment details on the appointment card helped to reduce missed appointments at health centres by 18%, compared to a situation when the health centre staff wrote down this information on the appointment cards.This is an example of:*
A1: Reciprocity
A2: Authority
A3: Consistency and commitment
A4: Scarcity
Q10: *Announcement of Black Friday sales leads to enormous crowds of shoppers hunting for bargains on that one day; shoppers being tempted by enormous savings that supposedly will be available only on that day. This is an example of:*
A1: Social proof
A2: Authority
A3: Liking
A4: Scarcity
Q11: '*Based on your experience, what do you suggest we do here?'* This is an example of:
A1: Funnel question
A2: Closed question
A3: Disempowering question
A4: Empowering question
Q12: *'So, if I get this qualification, will I get a raise?'* This is an example of:
A1: Funnel question
A2: Closed question
A3: Open question
A4: Empowering question

Q13: *'Do you love our amazing support team?'* This is an example of:
A1: Leading question
A2: Open question
A3: Rhetorical question
A4: Disempowering question
Q14: *'Don't you love the way the text picks up the colours in the photographs?'* This is an example of:
A1: Empowering question
A2: Probing question
A3: Rhetorical question
A4: Closed question
Q15: *'What exactly do you mean by fast-track?'* This is an example of:
A1: Disempowering question
A2: Probing question
A3: Closed question
A4: Funnel question
Q16: *'How can I help you understand that a little better?'* This is an example of:
A1: Open question
A2: Rhetorical question
A3: Closed question
A4: Funnel question
Q17: *'Don't you know any better than that?'* This is an example of:
A1: Probing question
A2: Closed question
A3: Empowering question
A4: Disempowering question

Q18: *'Were any of them wearing anything distinctive?' This is an example of:*
A1: Probing question
A2: Open question
A3: Funnel question
A4: Empowering question
Q19: *Which statement is false?*
A1: With the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood.
A2: Hearing is a physical process that, provided you do not have any hearing problems, happens automatically.
A3: Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process.
A4: Listening means paying attention not only to the story, but to the way it is told, eg. body language, voice, etc.
Q20: *Which of the following statements describes discriminative listening?*
A1: It involves the understanding of the meaning of words or phrases.
A2: It is developed at a very early age.
A3: This is the most complex form of listening.
A4: Each kind of voice sounds the same for the recipient.
Q21: *Which of the following statements does not describe the comprehensive listening?*
A1: It is more complex than discriminative listening.
A2: Using overly complicated language or technical jargon, therefore, can be a barrier to comprehensive listening.
A3: Two different people listening to the same thing may understand the message in two different ways
A4: It is involuntary and doesn't imply understanding the message.
Q22: *Which of the following types of listening is the most active one?*
A1: comprehensive listening

A2: informational listening
A3: empathic listening
A4: critical listening
Q23: *While listening actively recipient's interest can be conveyed to the speaker by using both verbal and non-verbal messages such as:*
A1: avoiding eye contact
A2: agreeing by saying 'Yes' or simply 'Mmm hmm'
A3: trying not to show any emotions
A4: avoiding giving feedback
Q24: *Which of the following elements is not a part of the 4-ears model of Schulz von Thun?*
A1: factual information
A2: appeal
A3: relationship
A4: motivation
Q25: *A good feedback shouldn't be…*
A1: constructive
A2: precise
A3: planned
A4: delayed
Q26: *Which of the following elements is common both for positive and negative feedback?*
A1: description of one's behaviour or performance
A2: establish plan for future
A3: listening and reaction
A4: explain the positive impact
Q27: *In case of the negative feedback, if your recipient is confused, you should:*
A1: describe one more time the behaviour or performance you want to redirect

A2: specify your expectations for actions
A3: explore positive results
A4: explain the positive impact
Q28: *The last element of both negative and positive feedback giving process should be:*
A1: plan for future
A2: help offer
A3: giving thanks your recipient
A4: explain the positive impact